

COUPLINGS FOR MOLTEN METAL DEVICES

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims the benefit of provisional application no. 60/395,471, entitled "Couplings and Protective Coatings for Molten Metal Devices," filed on July 12, 2002.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates to novel couplings that may be used in various devices, such as pumps, degassers and scrap melters used in molten metal baths. One aspect of the invention is a rigid coupling including a counterweight to generally maintain concentric rotation of the shaft. Another aspect of the invention is a rotor shaft to motor shaft coupling that decreases the possibility of breakage, maintenance and downtime in case the rotor is jammed. Another aspect is a shaft coupling for transferring gas that, among other things, decreases the possibility of gas leakage.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] As used herein, the term "molten metal" means any metal or combination of metals in liquid form, such as aluminum, copper, iron, zinc and alloys thereof. The term "gas" means any gas or combination of gases, including argon, nitrogen, chlorine, fluorine, freon, and helium, that are released into with molten metal.

[0004] Known molten-metal pumps include a pump base (also called a housing or casing), one or more inlets (an inlet being an opening in the housing to allow molten metal to enter a pump chamber), a pump chamber, which is an open area formed within the housing, and a discharge, which is a channel or conduit of any structure or type communicating with the pump chamber (in an axial pump the chamber and discharge may be the same structure or different areas of the same structure) leading from the pump chamber to an outlet, which is an opening formed in the exterior of the housing through which molten metal exits the casing. A rotor, also called an impeller, is mounted in the pump chamber and is connected to a drive system. The drive system is typically a rotor shaft connected to one end of a drive shaft, the other end of the drive shaft being connected to a motor. Often, the rotor shaft is comprised of graphite, the motor shaft is comprised of steel and the two are connected by a

coupling. As the motor turns the drive shaft the drive shaft turns the rotor and the rotor pushes molten metal out of the pump chamber, through the discharge, out of the outlet and into the molten metal bath. Most molten metal pumps are gravity fed, wherein gravity forces molten metal through the inlet and into the pump chamber as the rotor pushes molten metal out of the pump chamber.

[0005] Molten metal pump casings and rotors usually employ a bearing system comprising ceramic rings wherein there are one or more rings on the rotor that align with rings in the pump chamber (such as rings at the inlet and outlet) when the rotor is placed in the pump chamber. The purpose of the bearing system is to reduce damage to the soft, graphite components, particularly the rotor and pump base, during pump operation. A known bearing system is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,203,681 to Cooper, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. As discussed in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,591,243 and 6,093,000, each to Cooper, the disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference, bearing rings can cause various operational and shipping problems. To help alleviate this problem, U.S. Patent No. 6,093,000 discloses a rigid coupling to enable the use of a monolithic rotor without any separate bearing member. The rigid coupling assists in maintaining the rotor centered within the pumping chamber and rotating concentrically (i.e., without wobble). If the rotor wobbles too much while it rotates, it may bump against the inner surface of the pump chamber or other components, such as ceramic bearing rings, causing damage to itself and/or other parts, hinder smooth rotation of the pump and cause downtime and maintenance costs. Positioning and maintaining the rotor in the center of the pumping chamber and reducing any nonconcentric movements that would cause the rotor to contact other parts of the pump would help to prevent damage to the pumping device and reduce downtime and the need for replacement components. Moreover, if the rotor is maintained in the center of the pump chamber the bearing rings or bearing members could potentially be eliminated.

[0006] A number of submersible pumps used to pump molten metal (referred to herein as molten metal pumps) are known in the art. For example, U.S. Patent No. 2,948,524 to Sweeney et al., U.S. Patent No. 4,169,584 to Mangalick, U.S. Patent No. 5,203,681 to Cooper, U. S. Patent No.

6,093,000 to Cooper and U.S. Patent No. 6,123,523 to Cooper all disclose molten metal pumps. The term submersible means that when the pump is in use its base is submerged in a bath of molten metal.

[0007] Three basic types of pumps for pumping molten metal, such as molten aluminum, are utilized: circulation pumps, transfer pumps and gas-release pumps. Circulation pumps are used to circulate the molten metal within a bath, thereby generally equalizing the temperature of the molten metal. Most often, circulation pumps are used in a reverbatory furnace having an external well. The well is usually an extension of the charging well where scrap metal is charged (i.e., added).

[0008] Transfer pumps are generally used to transfer molten metal from the external well of a reverbatory furnace to a different location such as a ladle or another furnace.

[0009] Gas-release pumps, such as gas-injection pumps, circulate molten metal while introducing a gas into the molten metal. In the purification of molten metals, particularly aluminum, it is frequently desired to remove dissolved gases such as hydrogen, or dissolved metals, such as magnesium. As is known by those skilled in the art, the removing of dissolved gas is known as "degassing" while the removal of magnesium is known as "demagging." Gas-release pumps may be used for either of these purposes or for any other application for which it is desirable to introduce gas into molten metal.

[0010] Gas-release pumps generally include a gas-transfer conduit having a first end that is connected to a gas source and a second submerged in the molten metal bath. Gas is introduced into the first end and is released from the second end into the molten metal. The gas may be released downstream of the pump chamber into either the pump discharge or a metal-transfer conduit extending from the discharge, or into a stream of molten metal exiting either the discharge or the metal-transfer conduit. Alternatively, gas may be released into the pump chamber or upstream of the pump chamber at a position where it enters the pump chamber.

[0011] Generally, a degasser (also called a rotary degasser) includes (1) a rotor shaft having a first end, a second end and a passage for transferring gas, (2) an impeller, and (3) a drive source for rotating the rotor shaft and the impeller. The first end of the rotor shaft is connected to the drive source

and to a gas source and the second end is connected to the connector of the impeller. Examples of rotary degassers are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,898,367 entitled "Dispersing Gas Into Molten Metal," U.S. Patent No. 5,678,807 entitled "Rotary Degassers," and U.S. Application Ser. No. 09/569,461 to Cooper entitled "Molten Metal Degassing Device," filed May 12, 2000, the respective disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0012] In known rotary degassers, gas is transferred from a gas source through the rotor shaft and into the molten metal. Usually, the gas is transferred to a rotary union connected at one end to a passage in the motor shaft and connected at the other end to gas source. Gas is transferred through the motor shaft passage into a coupling and then transferred via the coupling into a passage in the rotor shaft. The gas is released from the end of the rotor shaft submersed in the molten metal bath. Known coupling-to-rotor shaft connections are usually threaded, and gas can seep into the threaded connections causing the graphite threads of the rotor shaft to wear. This leads to maintenance, downtime and component replacement.

[0013] Generally a scrap melter includes an impeller affixed to an end of a drive shaft, and a drive source attached to the other end of the drive shaft for rotating the shaft and the impeller. The movement of the impeller draws molten metal and scrap metal downward into the molten metal bath in order to melt the scrap. A circulation pump is preferably used in conjunction with the scrap melter to circulate the molten metal in order to maintain a relatively constant temperature within the molten metal. Scrap melters are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,598,899, to Cooper U.S. Patent Application Ser. No. 09/649,190 to Cooper, filed August 28, 2000, and U.S. Patent No. 4,930,986 to Cooper, the respective disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0014] The materials forming the components used in a molten metal bath should remain relatively stable in the bath. Structural refractory materials, such as graphite or ceramics, that are resistant to disintegration by corrosive attack from the molten metal may be used. As used herein "ceramics" or "ceramic" refers to any oxidized metal (including silicon) or carbon-based material, excluding graphite, capable of being used in the environment of a molten metal bath. "Graphite"

means any type of graphite, whether or not chemically treated. Graphite is particularly suitable for being formed into pump components because it is (a) soft and relatively easy to machine, (b) not as brittle as ceramics and less prone to breakage, and (c) less expensive than ceramics.

[0015] In addition to the afore-mentioned problems of nonconcentric movement and gas leakage, jamming is sometimes a problem with molten metal pumps. Pieces of brick, dross or other solids can pass into the pump chamber while the rotor is turning and become lodged between the rotor and pump chamber. This can cause the rotor to jam and damage the rotor and/or rotor shaft and/or rotor shaft-to-motor shaft coupling.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0016] The present invention helps to alleviate the afore-mentioned problems by providing a coupling to maintain a rotor centered within the pumping chamber during operation of a molten metal pump, i.e., to help prevent nonconcentric movements that may cause the rotor to bump or rub or bump against the pump chamber or bearing surfaces. The rigid coupling of the present invention may include a counterweight to balance the coupling, and allows the rotor shaft and rotor to rotate with relatively little wobble.

[0017] Another aspect of the invention is a coupling for transferring gas into a shaft (preferably a rotor shaft) and a shaft configured to be used with the coupling. The coupling preferably includes a coupling member having a bore with an opening, the bore including an end proximal to the opening and an end distal to the opening. The distal end is preferably smooth and tapered with no threads. The coupling is preferably threaded at the proximal end, most preferably with course threads. The end of the shaft configured to be received in the bore has a mating smooth, tapered portion and mating course threads. When the end of the shaft is received in the bore, the tapered portion of the shaft is received in and aligns with the tapered, distal end of the bore, which assists in centering the shaft. Further, the mating of the smooth, tapered surfaces helps to prevent gas leaks thereby leading to longer component life.

[0018] The invention also relates to a motor-shaft-to-rotor-shaft coupling that does not include

a physical connection between the rotor shaft and motor shaft. Therefore, in the event the rotor becomes jammed, the resulting torque overloads the coupling, and the drive from the motor and motor shaft are disconnected from the rotor shaft and rotor, thus helping to prevent any component damage.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

[0019] Figure 1 is a perspective view of a pump for pumping molten metal, which may include a coupling (not shown) according to the invention.

[0020] Figure 2 is a perspective view of a rotor that may be used with the pump of Fig. 1.

[0021] Figure 3 is a cross-sectional view taken along line 1A-1A of Figure 1 with the rotor removed.

[0022] Figure 3A is a cross-sectional view showing an alternate pump base without bearing rings.

[0023] Figure 4 is a perspective view of a rotor shaft that may be used with the pump of Fig. 1.

[0024] Figure 5 is a perspective view of a rotor shaft having a top (or first) end with two opposing flat surfaces and two opposing curved surfaces.

[0025] Figure 6 shows a rotary degasser according to the invention.

[0026] Figure 7 is an elevational view of the shaft of the degasser of Figure 6.

[0027] Figure 8 shows a scrap melter according to the invention.

[0028] Figure 9 is view showing the shaft and impeller of the scrap melter of Figure 8.

[0029] Figure 10 is a perspective view of a rigid coupling member according to the invention.

[0030] Figure 11 is a bottom, perspective view of the coupling member shown in Figure 10.

[0031] Figure 12 is a side view of a preferred coupling for transferring gas between two shafts, the coupling including a first coupling member and a second coupling member.

[0032] Figure 13 is a bottom perspective view of the second coupling member of Figure 12.

[0033] Figure 14 is a side view of a shaft with an end configured to be received in the second coupling member of Figure 13.

[0034] Figure 15 is a side view of a preferred magnetic coupling that can be used in the practice of the invention.

[0035] Figure 16 is a side view of an alternate impeller that may be used with a pump according to the invention.

[0036] Figure 17 is a front, perspective view of the impeller of Figure 16.

[0037] Figure 18 is a side view of an alternate impeller that may be used in a pump according to the invention.

[0038] Figure 19 is an end of an alternate rotor shaft according to the invention.

[0039] Figure 20 is the opposite end of the rotor shaft shown in Figure 19.

[0040] Figure 21 is a partial cross-sectional end view of a coupling that may be used with the shaft shown in Figures 19-20.

[0041] Figure 22 is a partial side, partial cross-sectional side view of the coupling of Figure 21 shown connected to the end of the rotor shaft shown in Figure 18.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0042] Referring now to the drawing where the purpose is to illustrate and describe different embodiments of the invention, and not to limit same, Figure 1 shows a molten metal pump 10 in accordance with the present invention. System 10 includes a pump 20. For any device described herein, any of the components that contact the molten metal are preferably formed by a material that can withstand the molten metal environment. Preferred materials are oxidation-resistant graphite and ceramics, such as silicon carbide. Oxidation-resistant graphite is most preferred because of its relatively low cost and ease of manufacturing. Additionally, any of the components may be "protected components" as described in a co-pending U.S. Application entitled "Protective Coatings For Molten Metal Devices," filed on July 14, 2003, the inventor of which is Paul V. Cooper. The disclosure of this co-pending application is incorporated herein by reference.

[0043] Pump 20 is specifically designed for operation in a molten metal furnace or in any environment in which molten metal is to be pumped or otherwise conveyed. Pump 20 can be any

structure or device for pumping or otherwise conveying molten metal, such as the tangential-discharge pump disclosed in United States Letters Patent No. 5,203,681 to Cooper, or an axial pump having an axial, rather than tangential, discharge, or any type of molten metal pump having any type of discharge. Basically, preferred pump 20 has a pump base 24 submersible in a molten metal bath B. Pump base 24 includes a generally nonvolute pump chamber 26, such as a cylindrical pump chamber or what has been called a "cut" volute (although pump base 24 may have any shape pump chamber suitable of being used, such as a volute-shaped chamber). Chamber 26 has a top inlet 28, bottom inlet 29, tangential discharge 30 (although another type of discharge, such as an axial discharge may be used), and outlet 32. One or more support posts 34 connect base 24 to a superstructure 36 of pump 20 thus supporting superstructure 36. Post clamps 35 secure posts 34 to superstructure 36. A rotor drive shaft 38 is connected at one end to rotor 100 and at the other end to a coupling (not shown in this figure). A motor 40, which can be any structure, system or device suitable for driving pump 20, but is preferably an electric, hydraulic or pneumatic motor, is positioned on superstructure 36 and is connected to a drive shaft 12. Drive shaft 12 can be any structure suitable for rotating the impeller, and preferably comprises a motor shaft (not shown in this figure) that connects to rotor shaft 38 via the coupling. Pump 20 is usually positioned in a pump well, which is part of the open well of a reverbatory furnace.

[0044] A rotor, also called an impeller, 100 is positioned at least partially within pump chamber 26. Preferred rotor 100 is preferably imperforate, triangular (or trilobal), and includes a circular base 104 (as shown in Fig. 2) although any type or shape of impeller suitable for use in a molten metal pump may be used to practice the invention, such as a vaned impeller or a bladed impeller or a bird-cage impeller, these terms being known to those skilled in the art, and the impeller may or may not include a base. For example, U.S. Patent No. 6,093,000 to Cooper discloses numerous impellers that may be used in a pump according to the invention. Such impellers may or may not include a bearing ring, bearing pin or bearing members.

[0045] A rotor 100, shown in Fig. 2, is sized to fit through both inlet openings 28 and 29. Rotor 100 preferably has three vanes 102. Rotor 100 also has a connecting portion 114 to connect to

rotor drive shaft 38. A rotor base, also called a flow-blocking and bearing plate, 104 is mounted on either the bottom 106 or top 108 of rotor 100. Base 104 is sized to rotatably fit and be guided by the appropriate one of bearing ring members 60 or 60A mounted in casing 24, shown in Figure 3. In the embodiment shown, base 104 has an outer perimeter 110. Preferably, one of inlet openings 28 and 29 is blocked, and most preferably bottom inlet 29 is blocked, by rotor base 104.

[0046] Any suitable impeller may be used in the invention, and one preferred impeller is impeller 2000, shown in Figures 15-16. Impeller 2000 has multiple inlets 2002 preferably formed in its upper surface and multiple vanes 2004. Impeller 2000 includes a connection section 2006, which is preferably a threaded bore. Another alternate impeller 2100 is shown in Figure 17. Impeller 2100 has a top surface 2102 including a connection section (not shown), which is preferably a threaded bore. Impeller 2100 also includes a base 2104 and vanes 2106.

[0047] As shown in Figure 3, preferred pump base 24 can have a stepped surface 40 defined at the periphery of chamber 26 at inlet 28 and a stepped surface 40A defined at the periphery of inlet 29, although one stepped surface would suffice. Stepped surface 40 preferably receives a bearing ring member 60 and stepped surface 40A preferably received a bearing ring member 60A. Each bearing member 60, 60A is preferably comprised of silicon carbide. The outer diameter of members 60, 60A varies with the size of the pump, as will be understood by those skilled in the art. Bearing members 60, 60A each has a preferred thickness of 1" or greater. Preferably, bearing ring member 60, is provided at inlet 28 and bearing ring member 60A is provided at inlet 29, respectively, of casing 24. In the preferred embodiment, bottom bearing ring member 60A includes an inner perimeter, or first bearing surface, 62A, that aligns with a second bearing surface and guides rotor 100 as described herein. Alternatively, bearing ring members 60, 60A need not be used. For example, Fig. 3A shows a pump casing 24' that is preferably formed entirely of graphite. Such a pump casing 24' has no bearing ring, but instead has bearing surfaces 61' and 62A' integral with and formed of the same material as pump casing 24'. Pump casing 24' preferably, in all other respects, is the same as casing 24.

[0048] The rotor of the present invention may be monolithic, meaning for the purposes of this

disclosure that it has no bearing member such as a separate ring or pin. A monolithic rotor may be used with any type or configuration of pump casing, including a casing with a bearing ring or a casing without a bearing ring. Rotor 100 as shown in Figure 2 is monolithic and preferably formed of a single composition, such as oxidation-resistant graphite. As used herein, the term composition means any generally homogenous material and can be a homogenous blend of different materials. A monolithic rotor may be formed of multiple sections although it is preferred that it be a single, unitary component.

[0049] Bearing surface 110 is formed of the same material as rotor 100 and is preferably integral with rotor 100. Any of the previously described rotor configurations described herein (such as the rotors shown in U.S. Patent No. 6,093,000) may be monolithic, having a second bearing surface comprised of the same composition as the rotor, and fitting into the pump chamber and against the first bearing surface in the manner previously described herein.

[0050] Most known couplings, in order to reduce the likelihood of damage to the rotor shaft, and to prevent damage to the rotor-shaft-to-motor-shaft coupling, are flexible to allow for movement. Such movement may be caused by jarring of the rotor by pieces of dross or brick present in the molten metal, or simply by forces generated by the movement of the rotor within the molten metal. Such a coupling is disclosed in pending U.S. Patent Application No. 08/759,780 to Cooper entitled "Molten Metal Pumping Device," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. Another flexible coupling is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,203,681 to Cooper at column 13, l. 47-column 14, l. 16.

[0051] When a monolithic rotor is used, it is preferred that the rotor be rigidly centered in the pump casing and, hence, within the first bearing surface, such as surface 62A' shown in Figure 3A. The preferred method for rigidly centering the rotor is by the use of a rigid motor-shaft-to-rotor-shaft coupling 600, as described in greater detail below. Maintaining the rotor centered helps to ensure a smooth operation of the pump and reduces the costs involved in replacement of damaged parts.

[0052] An embodiment of a rigid coupling according to the present invention is shown in Figs. 10-11. Rigid coupling 600 vertically and rigidly couples a motor shaft to a rotor shaft, such as rotor shaft 38. Rigid coupling 600 is preferably a one-piece coupling incorporating two coupling

members, first member 602 and second member 604. Member 602 can be any structure designed to connect to and receive suitable driving force from a motor shaft. In the preferred embodiment, coupling 602 is designed to receive a motor shaft (which is preferably cylindrical or keyed), within an opening (not shown) formed in upper surface 608. Set screws (not shown), are positioned in apertures 606, of which there are preferably three that are spaced equally about the circumference of member 602. The set screws are tightened against motor shaft 42 to help retain shaft 42 within the opening (not shown) of coupling 602.

[0053] Other rigid couplings may be used to practice the invention and include a counterbalance to keep the shaft and rotor centered during operation. For example, if rotor shaft 38 includes an internal passage for transferring gas, second coupling member 604 could be replaced by a coupling such as coupling 100 disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,678,807 to Cooper entitled "Rotary Degasser," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. Further, the coupling shown in U.S. Patent No. 6,093,000 may be used with a counterweight opposite the boss or bolt-retention device.

[0054] Second coupling member 604 is designed to rigidly retain rotor shaft 38 and includes an external surface or wall 608 and an opening 610. Member 604 preferably has an apparatus external to, and preferably attached to, external wall 608. The apparatus in the preferred embodiment is any structure or device for engaging or connecting coupling member 604 to rotor shaft 38. In the embodiment shown, one or more bosses or bolt-retention devices 611 are provided. Each of the two bolt-retention devices 611 has a bolt 612 received therein wherein each bolt 612 aligns with an aperture 614 formed in second coupling member 604. Each bolt-retention device 611 preferably includes a device, such as a T-cap device 616, that is pushed by a bolt 612 into a pressure fit alignment with the outer surface of an end of shaft 38 in order to secure shaft 38 in second coupling member 604. The threaded end of a bolt 612 is preferably threaded into an end of T-cap 616 and as bolt 612 is tightened, the T-cap device presses against the external surface of the end of rotor shaft 38. The part of T-cap 616 that presses against shaft 38 is preferably not threaded and wide enough so that it does not penetrate shaft 38 to a great degree. If device 616 were to significantly penetrate shaft 38, shaft 38 could

eventually break.

[0055] An optional counterbalance 618 is positioned generally opposite the apparatus to assist in reducing nonconcentric (e.g., wobbly) movements during rotation of the rotor shaft. The counterbalance (or counterweight) can be any structure capable of performing this function and may be attached to coupling 600 in any suitable manner. In the embodiment shown, counterbalance 618 is two weight structures 620 that are approximately aligned along a horizontal axis with each of the corresponding bolt-retention devices 611. Counterbalance 618 helps balance coupling 600. Counterbalance 618 may be any shape or size, or made of any material, but the structure and weight of any counterbalance should be sufficient to balance against the weight of the apparatus, or to otherwise assist in maintaining the concentric movement of rotor shaft 38.

[0001] A rotor shaft 2300 is shown in Figures 18 and 19. Shaft 2300 may be used with impeller 2000 or 2100 or any suitable impeller for use in a molten metal pump. Shaft 2300 has a non-coated graphite component 2301, a first end 2302 and a second end 2310. End 2302 has a bolt hole 2304 and a groove 2306 formed in its outer surface. A protective coating 2308 is positioned on non-coated component 2301 and extends from end 2302 to end 2310. Second end 2310 has flat, shallow threads 2312, although second end 2310 can have any structure suitable for connecting to a rotor.

[0002] A coupling 2400 is shown in Figures 20 and 21. Coupling 2400 has a second end 2402 designed for coupling a rotor shaft having an end configured like end 2302 of shaft 2300 and further includes a first end configured to couple to the end of a motor shaft. The first end configured to couple to a motor shaft has the same structure as shown and described in one or more of the references to Cooper incorporated by reference herein, and shall not be described in detail here.

[0003] Second end 2402 of coupling 2400 has an annular outer wall 2403 and two aligned apertures 2403 formed therein. A cavity 2406 is defined by wall 2403 and a ridge 2408 is positioned on the inner surface of wall 2403. Ridge 2408 is preferably a section of steel welded to

wall 2403 such that its end is substantially flush with the end of section 2402. Ridge 2408 preferably has a length no greater than, and most preferably less than, the length of groove 2306.

[0004] As best seen in Figure 21, end 2302 is received in cavity 2406 and groove 2306 receives ridge 2408. Bolt hole 2304 aligns with apertures 2404 and a bolt 2450 is passed through apertures 2404 and through bolt hole 2304. A nut 2452 is then secured to end bolt 2450. In this manner, shaft 2300 is driven by the connection of groove 2306 and ridge 2408 and is less likely to be damaged.

[0056] Fig. 6 shows a preferred gas-release device 700 according to the invention. Device 700 is designed to operate in a molten metal bath B' contained within a vessel 1. Device 700 is preferably a rotary degasser and includes a shaft 701, an impeller 702 and a drive source (not shown). Device 700 preferably also includes a drive shaft 705 and a coupling 720. Shaft 701 and impeller 702 are preferably made of graphite impregnated with an oxidation-resistant solution.

[0057] Preferred device 700 is described in greater detail in U.S. Patent Application Ser. No. 09/569,461 to Cooper entitled "Molten Metal Degassing Device," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. A coupling 720 that may be used in device 700 is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,678,807, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0058] As is illustrated in Figs. 6 and 7, shaft 701 has a first end 701A, a second end 701B, a side 706 and an inner passage 708 for transferring gas. End 701B preferably has a structure, such as the threaded end shown, for connecting to an impeller. Shaft 701 may be a unitary structure or may be a plurality of pieces connected together. The purpose of shaft 701 is to (1) connect to impeller 702 in order to rotate the impeller, and (2) transfer gas into the molten metal bath. Any structure capable of performing these functions can be used.

[0059] Figs. 7 and 8 show a scrap melter 800. All of the components of scrap melter 800 exposed to molten metal bath B'' are preferably formed from oxidation-resistant graphite or other material suitable for use in molten metal. Preferred scrap melters that may be used to practice the invention are described in U.S. Patent Application Ser. No. 09/049,190 to Cooper, filed August 28,

2000, U.S. Patent No. 4,598,899 to Cooper and U.S. Patent No. 4,930,986 to Cooper.

[0060] A drive source 828 is connected to impeller 801 by any structure suitable for transferring driving force from source 828 to impeller 801. Drive source 828 is preferably an electric, pneumatic or hydraulic motor although, as used herein, the term drive source refers to any device or devices capable of rotating impeller 801.

[0061] A drive shaft 812 is preferably comprised of a motor drive shaft (not shown) connected to an impeller drive shaft 840. The motor drive shaft has a first end and a second end, the first end being connected to motor 828 by any suitable means and which is effectively the first end of drive shaft 812 in the preferred embodiment. An impeller shaft 840 has a first end 842 (shown in Fig. 13) and a second end 844. The preferred structure for connecting the motor drive shaft to impeller drive shaft 840 is a coupling (not shown). The coupling preferably has a first coupling member and a second coupling member. The first end 842 of impeller shaft 840 is connected to the second end of the motor shaft, preferably by the coupling, wherein the first end 842 of impeller shaft 840 is connected to the second coupling member and the second end of the motor drive shaft is connected to the first coupling member. The motor drive shaft drives the coupling, which, in turn, drives impeller drive shaft 840. Preferably, the coupling and first end 842 of the impeller shaft 840 are connected without the use of connecting threads.

[0062] Impeller 801 is an open impeller. The term "open" used in this context refers to an impeller that allows dross and scrap to pass through it, as opposed to impellers such as the one shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,930,986, which does not allow for the passage of much dross and scrap, because the particle size is often too great to pass through the impeller. Preferred impeller 801 is best seen in Fig. 13. Impeller 801 provides a greater surface area to move molten metal than conventional impellers, although any impeller suitable for use in a scrap melter may be used. Impeller 801 may, for example, have a perforate structure (such as a bird-cage impeller, the structure of which is known to those skilled in the art) or partially perforate structure, and be formed of any material suitable for use in a molten metal environment. Impeller 801 is preferably imperforate, has two or more blades, is

attached to and driven by shaft 812 (by being attached to shaft 840 in the preferred embodiment), and is preferably positioned centrally about the axis of shaft 840.

[0063] Fig. 12 shows a coupling 1000 for connecting to a shaft and transferring gas to the shaft. A preferred shaft to which gas is transferred is shown in Fig. 14. Coupling 1000 is preferably made of stainless steel and preferably includes a first coupling member 1100, a second coupling member 1200, a shaft 1300, and a passage 1110. Member 1100 is a generally known structure for gas transfer and includes a leading surface 1102 and a trailing surface 1104. An opening 1106 leads to a tapered bore 1108 formed in member 1100 between leading surface 1102 and passage 1110. Flanges 1112 include apertures 1114 for receiving bolts (not shown) or set screws (not shown). Coupling member 1100 connects to the motor drive shaft of a rotary degasser or any other device, such as a molten metal pump, wherein gas is transferred from the motor device shaft into another shaft. Any structure capable of connecting coupling 1000 to the motor drive shaft may be used.

[0064] Shaft 1300 has parts 1302 and 1304, although any shaft may be used or there may be no shaft between coupling members 1100 and 1200. A passage 1306 is formed in shaft 1300 in order to transfer gas from coupling member 1100 to coupling member 1200.

[0065] Coupling member 1200, shown in Figs. 12 and 13, has a proximal end 1202 and a distal end 1204. An opening 1206 leads to a bore 1208. Bore 1208 contains threads 1210 juxtaposed the proximal end. Threads 1210 are preferably course ACME threads (most preferably 3/8" ACME thread) to allow for easy installation and removal of the rotor shaft. End 1212 of bore 1208 near the distal end 1204 is tapered, contains no threads and is preferably smooth. Apertures 1214 are designed to receive a tool (not shown) for disconnecting the shaft from the coupling.

[0066] Rotor shaft 1400, shown in Fig. 14, is preferably comprised of oxidation-resistant graphite, although any material(s) suitable for use in a molten metal bath may be used, and has an outermost perimeter 1402. An end 1404 is structured to be received into bore 1208 of second coupling member 1200 so that gas may be transferred from passage 1306 into passage 1410. End 1404 includes a generally smooth, tapered portion 1406 and a threaded portion 1408 between tapered portion 1406

and outermost perimeter 1402. The opposite end (not shown) of shaft 1400 can be of any configuration, including a configuration for connecting to an impeller or other structure.

[0067] When end 1404 is received in bore 1208, tapered portion 1406 is received into the tapered portion 1212 of bore 1208. When these tapered, generally smooth surfaces align, the close fit helps to prevent gas leakage (gas leakage could occur if this upper portion 1406 of the bore were threaded, because the threads do not mate perfectly and gas seeps between them) and helps to center the shaft and reduce shaft vibration. When gas leakage is reduced, less gas contacts the graphite threads in threaded portion 1408 of shaft 1400. The threads thus remain stable longer (because certain gases, such as chlorine gas, degrade the threads) and shaft 1400 lasts longer.

[0068] Turning now to Fig. 15, a magnetic coupling 2000 that can be used with either a pump or a scrap melter is shown. The coupling is preferably manufactured by MagnaDrive Corporation, 1177 Fairview Avenue North, Seattle, Washington 98109, and is a MagnaGuard MGTL coupling. This coupling includes the following features: (1) torque is transferred from a conductor (motor) to permanent magnets (load); there is an air gap separating the motor from the load, and (2) varying the air gap alters the torque and speed of the driven shaft. These features assist in eliminating vibration transfer. Moreover, because there is a complete dislocation of the motor shaft (and motor) from the rotor shaft, in case of overload (which can occur if there is a jam), the torque of the driving (motor) shaft is disconnected from the driven (rotor) shaft thus helping to prevent component damage. When the jam is cleared, the coupling automatically resets itself to resume operation. A further benefit of this coupling is that it can eliminate the need and expense of variable speed motors, and could possibly eliminate the need for a gear box. Moreover, the rotor shaft need not be perfectly aligned with the motor shaft.

[0069] Coupling 2000 has a first coupling member 2002 and a second coupling member 2004. Coupling member 2002 connects to an end of motor shaft (not shown) and coupling member 2004 connects to an end of rotor shaft (not shown). Instead of coupling members 2002 and 2004 being physically connected, coupling member 2002 and coupling member 2004 are received into housing

2006 of coupling 2000, and there is a gap between members 2002 and 2004. Disk 2008 of member 2002 and 2010 of member 2004 face each other and the magnetic force of disk 2008 drives disk 2010, member 2002 and the rotor shaft. By varying the gap between members 2002 and 2004, the torque transmitted from member 2002 to member 2004 may be varied, i.e., the greater the gap, the lower the torque transmission.

[0070] Having thus described different embodiments of the invention, other variations and embodiments that do not depart from the spirit of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art. The scope of the present invention is thus not limited to any particular embodiment, but is instead set forth in the appended claims and the legal equivalents thereof. Unless expressly stated in the written description or claims, the steps of any method recited in the claims may be performed in any order capable of yielding the desired result.